

Office on Early Learning working on plan to help more 4-year-olds prepare for school

By **Georgenne "GG" Weisenfeld**

As director of the Executive Office on Early Learning, I am tasked with identifying programs to help prepare children for kindergarten and finding ways the state can support this effort.

The evidence is clear: Children who attend high-quality programs prior to kindergarten perform better academically than children who do not have the same opportunity.

This is seen by critical indicators such as third-grade reading scores and ninth-grade grade point averages, as well as the reduced likelihood of a student dropping out of high school and increased college attendance.

However, not all children have equal access to these

programs. In Hawaii, it is estimated that only 56 percent of 4-year-olds attend a program that will prepare them for kindergarten and beyond.

In order to address this social injustice, Gov. Neil Abercrombie is requesting that the Legislature expand the school readiness program to establish pre-kindergarten classes on Department of Education (DOE) campuses and fund family and child-interaction learning programs to provide engagement for 4-year-olds.

These programs will serve an additional 1,040 children.

The DOE proposal will cost \$4.5 million to mainly fund staff, consisting of

Hawaii State Teachers Association (HSTA) and Hawaii Government Employees Association (HGEA) members, who will implement a quality program for 4-year-olds with support from my office.

An additional \$1 million is proposed for the family engagement program that will support providers in reaching families who do not choose to send their children to

a program but still need support in preparing children for the demands of kindergarten.

An additional \$218,000 is requested for the Executive Office on Early Learning to oversee the implementa-

tion of these programs.

I look forward to working with the HSTA, its members, the state Board of Education and the Legislature to turn this request into a reality, which will prepare our keiki for success in the transition to kindergarten and beyond.

As part of our ongoing collaborative efforts, we have also worked with the state Department of Human Services to increase the state portion of the co-payments for Preschool Open Doors by \$2.5 million for families of four earning less than \$67,725.

Our budget request is modest so we can build a solid, sustainable infrastructure to support high-quality programs for our 4-year-olds.

Investment in early education is an investment in our future.



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